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SUBJECT: ONTARIO COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL SERVICES MINISTER
PUPATELLO ON BORDER ISSUES AND SHARIA LAW

Ref: (A) Toronto 2248 (B) Toronto 2255
(C) Toronto 2426 (D) Toronto 2568

Sensitive but Unclassified - Protect accordingly.

1. (SBU) Summary: Ontario Community and Social Services Minister Papatello emphasized the importance the Ontario Government places on relations with the United States during an October 13 courtesy call the Consul General paid on her. Papatello digressed from issues associated with her portfolio to raise her riding's concern with Windsor-Detroit border crossing issues, to include expressing displeasure with premature statements by Michigan Governor Granholm regarding options taken off the table in the bi-national process. She discussed Ontario's efforts to close its coal plants and expressed concerns about pollution from the Ohio Valley. She also recognized the need for Toronto to resolve its garbage problems. Papatello insisted that her Ministry, which has responsibility for women's issues, had been misrepresented in the media as a proponent of Sharia law. She said the Sharia law frenzy resulted from the Arbitration Act of 1992, which had no provisions for proper review to determine if its uses were in compliance with Canadian law. End Summary.

Relations with the United States Very Important

2. (U) The CG, accompanied by Conoff Steele (notetaker), paid a formal introductory call on Ontario Community and Social Services Minister Sandra Papatello on October 13. Minister Papatello noted her attendance at Ambassador Wilkins's dinner in Windsor on August 18, stating that U. S. relations are very important to the Ontario Government. She expressed the hope that her office would continue to have close relations with the Embassy and ConGen Toronto, and that the Ambassador would return to Windsor, her hometown, soon. She stated that her Ministry's primary responsibility is to work with vulnerable segments of the population "when other ministries, such as energy or education or health fail them."

Windsor-Detroit Border Crossing

3. (SBU) The CG and Minister Papatello discussed the bi-national process to identify a new border crossing site between Windsor and Detroit (ref (B)). Minister Papatello stated that the Ontario Government was not pleased by Michigan Governor Granholm's decision to publicly announce on October 4, on her own initiative, the Detroit River International Crossing Study decision to drop several border crossing options from the study. Papatello complained that Granholm should at least have called Premier McGuinty to let him know what she intended to do. Ontario officials were also displeased that Granholm's office subsequently delayed returning their calls on the issue while Michigan Department of Transportation official Mohammed Alghurabi continued to speak publicly on the issue throughout the week (Note: Premier McGuinty's staff has also lodged this complaint. End Note.).

4. (SBU) The CG observed that politics on both sides of the border impacts the process (ref (A)). She said that the process appeared more complicated in Canada, since environmental assessments take longer and the road infrastructure leading to the border is not as well integrated. Minister Papatello noted that the bi-national process is on schedule, and that it was hoped that some environmental assessments could be conducted concurrently to save time. She said Ontario would prefer that political leaders on both sides make decisions regarding the border crossing rather than engage in the bi-national process, but in the current litigious environment, she acknowledged this did not appear to be a viable option. The CG responded that waiting until 2013 would likely not reduce the number

of lawsuits and asked if Papatello had heard of the possibility of enacting omnibus legislation. Papatello said that this might be necessary, but all levels of government on both sides of the border would need to enact legislation in sync with each other.

15. (SBU) Minister Papatello mentioned that, as an MPP from Windsor, she was very involved in border issues. She commented on how difficult it was to be a provincial lobbyist and also look out for local interests in Windsor. She said Windsor currently had no voice at the federal level because Windsor's NDP opposition MP has no influence in the federal government. The federal government was only engaged with local issues if it felt it could win the local riding. This situation meant she must be a stronger advocate for Windsor than would otherwise be normal for a provincial Minister.

Coal and Trash: Cross-Border Environmental Issues

16. (SBU) Minister Papatello argued that Ontario needed to move forward with a significant conservation platform. She suggested that the province might not meet its goal of closing all coal-firing plants in the next four years if the only alternative was to buy energy produced by dirty coal burning plants from the United States because this would defeat the purpose of closing the plants. In her district, she claimed, fifty percent of air pollution derived from the Ohio Valley, an area Ontario cannot regulate. She noted that the provincial Minister of Environment was adamant in her belief that clean coal "was an oxymoron." But, she conceded, energy would always win out over environment in Ontario - the province, with its dependence on manufacturing, had learned its lesson from the 2003 blackout and the past summer's rolling brownouts. The CG pushed back that she believed Ontario had not given clean coal technology a fair hearing and promised to forward information on it and the FutureGen project to the Minister.

17. (SBU) Minister Papatello also admitted to the Consul General the need for Toronto to solve its garbage problem, commenting that the current recycling process is cumbersome and discourages the populace from following through. The CG noted that an EPA team that recently visited Toronto had been impressed by public compliance with recycling requirements, citing Toronto's strong public education program in this realm (ref (D)), but agreed that it was a stop-gap measure - incineration and landfill sites inside the province were the obvious solutions.

Sharia Law

18. (SBU) Minister Papatello told the Consul General that her office attempted to impede the province legally endorsing application of Sharia law in Ontario, rather than promote it as media reports suggested. She said concerns regarding this issue stemmed from the Arbitration Act of 1992, which allowed arbitration across the board to relieve pressure on the court system, but did not provide provisions to review adequately the act to see how it was being used and whether it was being implemented in compliance with Canadian law. The Ontario Government chose former NDP Attorney General Marion Boyd to head consultations after the media began reporting that the government was promoting Sharia law. She had spoken with the groups impacted, but no evidence was uncovered showing that arbitration was happening in violation of Canadian law.

19. (SBU) Public outrage - including expressions of very un-Canadian anti-immigrant sentiment - had prompted Premier McGuinty to rule out legal endorsement of arbitration decisions issued in accordance with Sharia law (ref (C)). Minister Papatello said the government would introduce legislation to strengthen the Arbitration Act, including proscribing the actions of arbitrators and setting forth qualifications. She also stated that the Ontario Women's Directorate would conduct public education to reach out to immigrant women and make them aware of their protections under Canadian law.

110. (SBU) COMMENT: The courtesy call lasted far longer than was scheduled; a fire drill eventually broke it up. Papatello is one of a series of provincial ministers who have recently gone out of their way to express with passion the importance of the U.S.-Canada relationship. Issues associated with the Minister's portfolio - new adoption legislation, in particular - had to be postponed for another conversation.

